

# THE ROLE OF RURAL LAND CERTIFICATION IN EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN

Degsew Melak

University of Gondar, Ethiopia

## Abstract

Ethiopia, Amhara Region in particular, has introduced recently rural land registration and certification with the goal of being able to recognize land rights and provide security of tenure to its citizens in an innovative way. The major objective of doing so was to establish systems of land administration that can provide tenure security to land holders. Systematic assessment of the performance of such systems with respect to gender would be of great importance to inform the policy debate. As a result, a study was conducted in three districts of Amhara Region, Ethiopia, to identify the role of land certification on women empowerment. The data was collected through interview schedule, focus group discussion and key informant interview. The findings of the study revealed that land right registration in the names of both husband and wife had enabled married women ownership right to access their land resource. However, none married women had partially benefited from their land resources. It was hardly given to women to have control over what crop to grow, what and how much inputs to use, frequency and time of management practices, etc. It is the sharecropper who can take the leading role in the decision land management. Recommendations include economic empowerment of women through access to credit, extension services, use of labour saving technologies, and effect legal registration of land transactions, including share cropping

Keywords: *land right registration, empowerment, land access, land transaction*

## Introduction

The issue of land and women's land rights in rural Africa is at the heart of scholarly literatures in recent years (Abdulai & Antwi, 2005; Zenabaworke, 2003; Wanyeki & Muthoni, 2003; Pankhurst & Helen, 1990; Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1997; Holden et al., 2009). Since land is central to the existence and livelihood of humankind. Hanna & Jentoft (1996), for instance, indicated that the human-environment attach to agrarian societies is so strong that land has emerged as one of the main means of survival for humans. It is also highlighted by Tenaw (2009) that land is

the most important assets of the rural population in Ethiopia, whose livelihood basically depends on agriculture. Cotula (2007) and Lastarria-Cornhiel (1997) have indicated three reasons for the close relationship between Africans and the land: source of livelihood, power and social status, and identity indicator of the people living on it.

National policies in Africa promote equitable access to land for women farmers. However, many of them lack secure land use rights and equitable access to finance, insurance, education and land (UN, 2009) cited in Tenaw (2009). Instead powerful groups and people are in control of vast areas of land in the sub-Saharan African region while small and powerless sections of the society are still marginalized and excluded from getting access to it (Cotula, 2007). Tenaw (2009) noted that the poor structure of land tenure, the lack of proper land ownership as well as lack of improved agricultural technology and changing climatic conditions are the main obstacles to increased agricultural output. Gender is widely recognized as a challenge for agricultural and rural development in many developing countries. Because of its adverse social and economic effects, it has attracted considerable attention from scientists and development agencies around the world (IFAD, 2006; Holden et al., 2009).

Registration of landholdings and granting land use certificates to land holders has recently become government policy in Ethiopia followed by establishment of land administration institutions. It was introduced in Ethiopia to improve tenure security through land registration and title certification in order to develop sense of user right on land and promote better land management and more investment (IFAD, 2006; Roth & Haase, 1998). In the process of land certification vulnerable section of the society, including women, are assumed to benefit from Certification of land title from two perspectives: improving tenure security and encouraging land and natural resources conservation and rehabilitation. Obviously, tenure insecurity has been the subject of much discussion, which seems to have convinced the government to develop such measures to improve the situation of land degradation (FAO, 2004; ECA, 2004; IFAD, 2006).

The central argument of this study is that land certification improves tenure security of women which in turn provides incentives to have control over their lands. Land titling and legal enforcement of title are fundamental for the widespread adoption and sustainable use of appropriate land related practices (Holden et al., 2009). The preceding argument on the land rights of rural women in sub-Saharan Africa seems to also apply for women of rural Ethiopia. In rural Ethiopia, land appears to be one of the causes for social inequality and conflict among most households despite the fact that it was redistributed in 1974 and 1997. The land redistribution has provides for

equal access to land for men and women (Askale, 2005). In addition, as Tesfaye (2003) noted, the availability and quality of rural land to users has decreased greatly because of population growth and environmental deterioration. These and other factors seem to exert negative impacts on the land rights of women in rural Ethiopia.

Previous studies in Ethiopia focused on access to land rights. Mamitu (2002), studied aspects of the status of Konso women and found that they are very hard working in domestic chores, on the fields, and in economic activities, but they still have secondary roles in the society. In addition, Getachew (2003) pointed out that female-headed households in Gozamin District of the Amhara Region are able to get land rights because of the 1997 land redistribution of regional law, but the size of the land is smaller than that of men's and its fertility low. In the same vein, Zenabaworke (2003) studied land right of women in three different parts of Ethiopia and indicated that women's access to land or the benefit they can draw from land, even where they have limited rights, is severely limited because of the gender-based division of labour, particularly the cultural taboos against women ploughing and sowing. Berhanu & Feyers (2005) have conducted survey research in few areas of Amhara Region to see the political and legislative frameworks that govern the land registration process, the demand for registration, actors involved in registration and its implication for environmental conservation, agricultural development and land markets. This makes it difficult to draw clear cut conclusion about the contribution of land certification on women right on their land. Analysis of land tenure issues in relation to land certification is, therefore, very essential to know whether land certification has really influential role in improving tenure security among women headed farmers. In view of this fact, a study was conducted in selected districts of North Gondar Administrative zone to understand the role of the land certification program on empowering women exercise their rights to their plot land they possessed. The main objective of this study was to understand and describe how the legally-recognized land rights of women are implemented in in Amhara Region, North Gondar administrative zone with the following research questions:

1. How do the current land registration and certification ascertain the land rights of women in rural North Gondar?
2. What is the role land certification in empowering women control of their land resource for improved land productivity?
3. What challenges are faced while implementing the legally-recognized land rights of women in the study sites?

### **Methodology**

Except the low land districts of North Gondar, land registration and certification is functional in almost all districts. Geographical location is not assumed to cause variation in the implementation of the certification program. In fact the behaviour of the farmer varies across the different localities. Thus the study was carried out in two different districts: Dembia and Dabat, which are located in North Gondar Administrative zone of Amhara Region. These two study areas were selected because Rural Land Registration and Certification Program have been implemented in these districts since 2004 and they represent the mid altitude and high altitude areas. In the lowland areas of the zone the program is not still completed and singled out from the selection of the study area.

A multistage sampling procedure was applied to identify the required number of sample farmers. In the first stage, described above, districts were stratified into mid land and highland agro ecology and two districts were selected purposively from each agro ecology taking into consideration accessibility, which makes the data collection process easy. Secondly, random selection of three kebeles was undertaken, from which land registration and certification is completed. The list of the landholders mentioned in the kebele registry was taken as sampling frame. So with the help of the development agents and land administration experts three kebeles was selected representing the selected districts. From each sample kebele 30 households were selected proportional to sample size so that they represent the whole kebele. In each district, a total of 90 households were selected considering resource and time limitation.

Structured questionnaire with some open-ended questions was used to collect the primary data from the sampled households. Pretesting of the questionnaire was be conducted before conducting a real survey in order to check its reliability and validity and as an exercise to introduce the questionnaire to local enumerators. Two focus group discussions and key informant interview were also conducted to collect primary data. Similarly, secondary data was collected from relevant literature: study reports, manuals, survey reports, officially published data and other related published papers.

Data collected from survey, focus group discussions and interviews were organized and tabulated. Data coding was done for questions that are suitable coding. Texts recorded during the interviews was condensed and compiled into short forms and categorized into different themes. Statistical package for the social sciences (Pallant, 2011) was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was also carried out through cross tabulation where by percentage, means,

frequency, ranking, and standard deviation was computed. Frequency analysis was used to list out each variable and to tabulate the number of times each value of a variable occurs and also to show the distribution of the responses of a variable.

Data from different source such from direct beneficiaries, focus group and key informant interview was triangulated in order to ensure the reliability of data from different sources. The qualitative data was organized and described and analysed qualitatively and the quantitative data were also analysed using appropriate descriptive statistics.

### **Results and discussion**

The participation of vulnerable groups, particularly women, in the implementation land certification process is an essential feature in the society. Vulnerable women may face discrimination on the basis of property right, including barriers to accessing, inheriting and enforcing rights to land. The rural women were targeted for the present study. Since active participation of women provide more reliable and qualitative understanding of their vulnerabilities and capacities. In one way or the other, they are particularly affected by the current land administration system. To this effect, the impact of land registration and certification on access, and right enforcement to land ownership was the subject of the study.

According to the officials report, the motive behind formalizing the land use rights of rural women through land registration and certification is to legalize the land use rights of rural women to address two objectives: (1) to redress the social and cultural problems that disempowered women from having access to land, and (2) to put into practice the property rights (movable & immovable) rural women enjoy in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution.

The respondents were asked about in whose name the land was registered. The response of farmers was reported in Table 1 below. The majority of respondents reported that their parcels of land was registered and certified in the names of women (20%) and both husband and wife (71.1%). There was high percentage of land registered in the name women. Only 8% parcel has been found registered in the names of men (see Table 1). This might be attributed to the fact that the husband might acquire and registered the land before marriage. Except such cases, there was no land registered and issuance of certificates in the names of husband only.

**Table 1. The response of farmers about the registration of land in what names (N=200)**

Registration in the names of	Frequency	Valid Percent
Men	16	8.0
Women	39	19.4
Both names	143	71.1
Others	3	1.5
Total	201	100.0

The findings of the study revealed that land is registered and certified in the names of both husband and wife, implying land certification ensured married women ownership right to their land resource. The joint certification of land right in the process of land registration and certification was an important justification to women's ownership right of land. Since as it was observed, the land certificate was inclusive in recording the personal details of land holders and their families. According to focus group discussants view, land certificates given to land holders should contain the names and addresses of the household head, his/her spouse, and siblings, in addition to the physical and positional details of the land. These same details are recorded in the Land Registry Book. The introduction of this legal framework has empowered women to take decision together with the husband also on land transactions in the form of land rental. Land administration committee's in the focus group discussion expressed their view that they usually demand the presence of the husband and wife while the joint landholding certificates were handed out. On the same occasion, both are briefly told about their entitlements regarding inheritance, divorce, children's rights and land transaction (renting) based on the land proclamation.

There has been considerable body of literature in Ethiopia dealing with gender and land rights issues, supporting this finding. In this regard, Askale (2005) study in Amhara Region shows that land certification has brought tangible improvements attained in facilitating women's access to land. Similarly IFAD (2006) study in Amhara National Regional State confirmed that land certificate was issued in the name of the husband and wife, and contains a list of all plots measured and names of family members. A research conducted by Askale (2005) also shows that the promotion of women's land rights through the joint titling provision in recent legislation and policy is commendable. As it was supported by studies conducted in Amhara Region, the finding of the present study proved the land registration and certification process has provided improved empowerment of women to secure greater land rights.

Respondents were also asked do women benefited most from land right certification. The

response is indicated below in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, 52.5% (101) of respondents gave their witness women were most benefited from land right registration. This finding supported the hypothesis that land rights registration did not brought tangible economic benefits (empowerment) of women. Perhaps, those women who are socially and economically disadvantaged have more difficulty protecting their rights.

**Table 2. Women land holding right secured as result of certification (N=200)**

Women benefit from certification	Security of land holding rights			Total	Percent
	yes	no	not sure		
yes	101	0	3	105	52.5
no	92	2	2	95	47.5

Though issuance of land certificate has improved sense of women ownership of land, there were problems affecting their capacity to enhance the benefits accrued from the land resources. The respondents interviewed mentioned that the risks they mainly faced were related to share croppers, and those share croppers were not ready leave the land at the end of the share cropping agreement. In many case women were given out their parcel of land to the share cropper. The major problems encountered women when they have given sharecropping were late ploughing and sowing, poor land management and non-use of fertilizer and improved seeds. Perhaps many of these problems are attributed to none existent of legal registration of land transaction. Legal land transactions registration (in the form of sharecropping), is mainly used by women headed household, reduced women vulnerability and risk in losing part of their crops (FAO, 2006). Similarly, Deininger et al. (2006) noted that land right certification helped to empower women, and improved governance at the local level.

**Table 3. Comparison production against sex**

Sex		Crop yield in quintals	
		1997	2003
Male	Mean	10.5980	12.6556
	Std. Deviation	9.19133	10.70312
Female	Mean	6.9149	4.9064
	Std. Deviation	9.83799	3.54182
Total	Mean	9.7325	10.8345
	Std. Deviation	9.45259	10.06231

Farm-level production and productivity was used to analyse the effect of land right certification on women economic empowerment through production gains. The basic assumption was that giving women secure land rights through land rights certification led to improvements in production and food security. Given women's tendency to grow food crops, land tenure security for women must be viewed as a key link in the chain from household food production. As a result, the



productivity of women headed households was decreasing from 6.9 quintals in 1997 to 4.9 quintals in 2003 (see Table 3). Women-owned land, by and large, did not show growth in annual cereal crop yields or change in production and productivity. The evidence suggests that there is extraordinarily difficult to achieve production improvement and women livelihood.

Mintewab's & Holden's (2010) finding is consistent to this finding that land right certification is beneficial to farm-level productivity; it does not necessarily lead to more gains for female-headed households. Due to the lack of resources for running the functions of farming on their own land, poor women do not benefit from the ownership of land resources. Getachew's (2003) study in Gozamin District of the Amhara Region also showed that female-headed households have smaller land size than that of men and its fertility low. In the same vein, Zenabaworke (2003) study on land rights of women in of Ethiopia showed that women's access to land or the benefit they can draw from land, even where they have limited rights, is severely limited because of the gender-based division of labour, particularly the cultural taboos against women ploughing and sowing. A study by Mintewab & Holden (2010) showed that certification has different impacts on male and female productivity with female-headed households gaining significantly more, particularly on plots rented out to other operators. World Bank's (2008) study in Ghana shows that women's rights to the land they work can impact productivity significantly. These all would remind that women involvement in land-related activities should be integrated and supported by training linked to income generating activities such as livestock, access to credit so that women could become economically active and could explore other income opportunities.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

This paper examined women control over their land in three districts of North Gondar, Amhara Region Ethiopia. Control of the land resource was taken as an important consideration in examining women's land rights. It was believed that this study provides information to all concerned development practitioners and policy makers so that they can make informed decisions. The finding of this study confirmed that security of tenure, not ownership right, was hardly given to women to have control over what crop to grow, what and how much inputs to use, frequency and time of management practices, etc. It is the sharecropper who can take the leading role in the decision land management.

The review of available literature reveals that the issue of rural land ownership rights has been a politically sensitive topic throughout the country. In the study districts of North Gondar, Amhara Region Ethiopia, land certificate was issued in the name of the husband and wife, and



contains a list of all plots measured and names of family members. The empirical results also indicate that women land ownership and control is an issue in many places.

Security of tenure is one element, but access to sufficient labour to work on the land, to resources to invest on the land, and to support services (extension services, credit services) are very important for improved productivity. Unless there are additional inputs such as credit, labour, and access to markets, secure tenure rights may offer women little. It is highly important to provide women benefits in terms of these economic advantages. Possibly future intervention should focus on economic empowerment of women through access to credit, use of labour saving technologies and effect legal registration of land transactions, including sharecropping.

## References

1. Abdulai R.T., Antwi A. (2005). Traditional Landholding Institutions and Individual Ownership of Land Rights in sub-Saharan Africa. *World Review of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development*, 2 (3/4): 302-319.
2. Askale T. (2005). Land Registration and Women's Land Rights in Amhara Region, Ethiopia. *Securing Land Rights in Africa*, iied Research Report 4, Russell Press, Nottingham, UK
3. Berhanu A., Fayers A. (2005). Land Registration in Amhara Region, Ethiopia (Research Report 3), IIED, November 2005
4. Cotula L. (2007). Changes in "Customary" Land Tenure Systems in Africa. Great Britain: IIED. Retrieved from <http://www.iied.org/pubs/pdfs/12537IIED.pdf>.
5. Deininger, K., J. Zevenbergen, A. Daniel (2006). Assessing the Certification Process of Ethiopia's rural Lands. At the frontier of land issues, Montpellier.
6. FAO (2004). Ethiopia Land Policy and Administration Assessment. *Final Report*
7. Getachew S. (2003). Household Access to Farmland and Socio-economic Status: The Case of Wonqa Kabale (Gozamin Woreda), Amhara Region. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University. Master's Thesis. Accessed from <http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/1151>
8. Holden S. T., Deininger K., Ghebru H. (2009). "Impacts of Low-cost Land Certification on Investment and Productivity." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 91 (2): 359-373.
9. IFAD (2006). Land Tenure Security for Poverty Reduction in Eastern and Southern Africa. Workshop Report, Kampala, 27-29 June 2006
10. Lastarria-Cornhiel S. (1997): "Impact of Privatization on Gender and Property Rights in Africa." *World Development*, 25 (8): 1317-1333
11. Mamitu Y. (2002). Some Aspects of the Status of Women among the Konso of Southern Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, Master Thesis. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/1131>
12. Mintewab B., Holden S. (2010). The Role of Land Certification in Reducing Gender Gaps in Productivity in Rural Ethiopia. Environment for Development, working paper
13. Pallant J. (2011). SPSS Survival Manual: step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS. 4th edition, Allen & Unwin, Australia
14. Pankhurst H. (1990). What Change and for Whom?: The Case of Women in Menz. In Siegfried Pausewang, Fantu Cheru, Stefan Brune and Eshetu Chole (eds.): Ethiopia: Options for Rural Development, London, Zed Books Ltd., 144-155.
15. Roth M., Haase D. (1998). Land Tenure Security and Agricultural Performance in Southern Africa. Broadcasting Access and Strengthening Input market.
16. Tenaw S., Islam K.M. Z., Parviainen T. (2009). Effects of land tenure and property rights on agricultural productivity in Ethiopia, Namibia and Bangladesh. University of Helsinki Department of Economics and Management Discussion Papers no 33.
17. Tesfaye B. (2003). Understanding Farmers: Explaining Soil and Water Conservation in Konso, Wolaita, and Wollo, Ethiopia. The Netherlands: Wageningen University and Research Center. PhD Dissertation. Retrieved from <http://library.wur.nl/ebooks/1676777.pdf>
18. UN (2009). African Agriculture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Meeting the Challenges, Making a Sustainable Green

- Revolution. High Level Meeting Convened by the UN Commission for Sustainable Development, 9-10 February, 2009 in Windhoek, Namibia.
19. Wanyeki L. M. (ed.) (2003). Women and Land in Africa: Culture, Religion, and Realizing Women's Rights. South Africa: David Philip Publishers.
  20. World Bank (2008). Rural land certification in Ethiopia Empowers women. Gender Equality as smart economics News Letter.
  21. Zenabaworke T. (2003). Women and Land Rights in the Third World: The Case of Ethiopia. In L. Muthoni Wanyeki (ed.): Women and Land in Africa: Culture, Religion and Realizing Women's Rights. South Africa: David Philip Publishers, 67-95.